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ABSTRACT

This document contends that efforts designed to determine how schools can educate children for the nation of tomorrow, by focusing primarily on curriculum issues, instruction, and teachers, may have overlooked the interpersonal factors which contribute to excellence and those human and social forces which may interfere with the attainment of excellence for all students. It cites a study conducted by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in conjunction with its Third National Conference of School Social Work, noting that the study findings lead to the conclusion that many human and social factors interfere with children's ability to achieve their potential. A number of major societal and family changes are discussed that deal with teenage suicide, emotional problems of gifted children, special education needs of seriously emotionally disturbed children, dropout rates, sexuality, immigrant students, child abuse and neglect, single-parent families, latchkey children, and drug abuse. The report defines excellence in education and identifies 50 barriers to excellence in the categories of family barriers, student/personal barriers, school-related barriers, community barriers, and policy/legislative and funding barriers. A section on recommendations focuses on both strategies for promoting excellence as articulated in the definition of excellence and strategies for overcoming the 50 identified barriers. The methodology of the NASW study and a list of the 50 barriers are appended. (NB)

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The HUMAN FACTOR:

A Key to Excellence in Education

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The HUMAN FACTOR:
A Key to Excellence in Education

Project sponsored by the 1985 NASW School Social Work Conference Planning Committee

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Foreword

When the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) was formed in 1955 from a merger of seven pre-existing organizations, the National Association of School Social Workers was one of its constituents. Today, many of its almost 100,000 members serve the school-age population, either directly in schools or in other settings. Many are members of teachers' unions or serve as educational administrators. State associations of school social workers exist in twenty-six states in addition to the NASW Chapters, and a major regional organization is active in the Midwest.

The National Association of Social Workers is initiating the celebration of its thirtieth anniversary with its third National Conference on School Social Work, "Educational Excellence in Transitional Times." The Planning Committee for this conference conducted the national project described in this report in order to mark the contribution of school social work to achieving excellence in education for all the children of this land. While academic instruction is the primary goal of public education, human and social factors are of major importance in achieving effective education. All children—the strong, the gifted, the intelligent, as well as those vulnerable because of poverty, racism, handicapping conditions or social problems—should enjoy education which brings out the best they have to offer. People must work together in order to produce excellence in education—educators, pupil services professionals, parents, and community members.

We thank the five hundred people in thirty states who participated in this project, and in particular the state coordinators who gave generously of their time and expertise. We hope that this report will document the need to integrate the human factor in our pursuit of educational excellence.

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—January 1985

Introduction

The compelling question—how can schools fulfill their primary task of educating children for the nation of tomorrow—has received great attention in recent years as a result of the demands and realities facing our youth and schools.

Perhaps the best known of the many recent studies and reports is *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. It documented serious problems in American education, urged the pursuit of excellence, and offered specific recommendations for its attainment. Other reports and studies followed, documenting the inadequacies of our educational systems and approaches and urging reform in ideology and strategy. All levels of government responded by prescribing a variety of solutions to ameliorate identified deficiencies. The majority of these programs focused primarily on curriculum issues, instruction and teachers.

But the interpersonal factors which contribute to excellence, and those human and social forces which may interfere with the attainment of excellence for all students have been largely overlooked. Education, so it seems, has been seen as an isolated, self-contained process, void of external influences. We submit that this view, as set forth, guarantees the failure of attempted reforms.

In recognition of the need to broaden the conceptual and practical approach to improving education by stressing the school—environmental relationship, the National Association of Social Workers initiated a study in conjunction with its Third National Conference on School Social Work (1985). (See Appendix A for methodology of the study). The goals of the study were to:

1. Document major human, social and interpersonal factors which are barriers to achieving excellence and begin a process of dealing with these factors in order to promote excellence; and
2. Promote programmatic and policy changes on the national, state and local school levels to overcome these barriers and promote excellence.

Based on the findings of our study, we conclude that many human and social factors interfere with children's ability to achieve their potential. Attention to these factors in conjunction with the structural and organizational components of the school will ultimately create excellence. A second major finding is that in order for excellence to be achieved, we must be aware of and responsive to existing and changing realities within the individual, school, community and society. Unless schools and communities are responsive to these human realities, efforts to achieve excellence will be thwarted. Schools already employ staff known as pupil services personnel to handle the problems caused by personal and social factors. They consist of school social workers, school psychologists,

"It is an undisputed fact that in the environment of the child outside of school are to be found forces which often thwart the school in its endeavors . . . The appointment of a visiting teacher (now known as a school social worker) is an attempt on the part of the school to meet its responsibility for the whole welfare of the child . . . and to secure maximum cooperation between the home and the school."

—**Julius John Oppenheimer,** *1925.*

guidance counselors, school nurses and others, frequently working as teams. Yet, these support services are generally understaffed.

The snapshot taken today of the current human and social needs may be different from the picture to be taken one year from now, two years or beyond. However, it is crucial to sensitize all persons within the educational system and its broader community to the effect human factors have upon the ability to achieve excellence. Finally, schools must be concerned with education of the whole child—being aware of both the strengths and needs each child brings in terms of intellectual, family, social and interpersonal realities.

Today, we see major societal and family changes occurring. Consider only a few:

• There is a growing incidence of teenage suicide. It is now the third largest killer for adolescents between the ages of 15-24. It is estimated that 18 youths every day succeed in commiting suicide. There are far greater numbers who attempt suicide. During the 1980s, teenagers experienced the fastest growing suicide rate of any age group. The incidence of adolescent suicide is now two times greater for whites than blacks, three to four times greater for boys than girls.

• Some authorities estimate that about half the 2.5 million gifted children in the United States encounter emotional problems such as depression, destructive perfectionism, and underachievement and that intellectually gifted students make up a disproportionate percentage of school drop-outs.

• In 1982, the Children's Defense Fund estimated that less than one-third of seriously emotionally disturbed children received special education. Seriously disturbed adolescents are especially likely to receive inadequate services. They are often expelled, suspended from school, given shortened school days or placed on homebound instruction.

• Only 74 percent of our children graduate from high school. Educational statistics indicate that individuals who have less than a high school education are generally twice as likely to be below the poverty level as those individuals having more education.

• Teenagers represent only 18 percent of sexually active women capable of becoming pregnant, but they account for 46 percent of all out-of-wedlock births and 31 percent of all abortions.

• Schools face the challenge of educating growing numbers of immigrant children, speaking a host of foreign languages and unfamiliar with the American way of life.

• In 1982, over 900,000 cases of child abuse and neglect were reported. Of these, 57 per-

"Our classrooms serve well over a million children of divorce, more than 12 million children who live with only one parent, a million victims of child abuse, spiraling numbers of children who are hungry and malnourished, children whose daydreams are nightmares of nuclear annihilation."

—**Mary Hatwood Futrell**, *President of the National Education Association*, 1984

cent were school aged children: 33 percent were from 6-11 years old and 24 percent were between 12-17 years old.

- Nationwide, the percentage of children living with only one parent has doubled from 11 percent in 1970 to 22 percent in 1982—for a total of 14 million children in that year alone. In over half of America's families, both parents are working.
- It is estimated that one quarter of the elementary school children in our public schools are "latch-key" children. School problems of absenteeism, undone homework and reduced concentration are often evidenced by these children.
- A recent National Institute on Drug Abuse survey reported that 57 percent of all high school seniors have tried marijuana, 33 percent experimented with stimulants and 16 percent have used cocaine. A Gallup poll conducted early in 1984 found that six out of every ten American teenagers now report drinking some form of alcoholic beverage, a considerable increase from the 41 percent figure reported in 1982.

These are but a few of the major life forces that can and do interfere with a child's ability to learn, succeed and actually participate in the learning process. In the rest of this report, we will outline which of these forces cause the greatest threats to educational excellence and how they can be overcome.

Many students "carry their lonely burdens and find themselves distracted from the traditional business of schools. How important is algebra if you've just overheard your parents' final quarrel before one of them left for good? Or if you are pregnant? Or if your best friend ran away or joined a cult or killed himself? Or if he or she is a drug addict, or if you're secretly afraid you are? All the homework and discipline in the world won't improve your school performance because the problems are not academic problems."

—**Gisha Berkowitz**, *New York Times 1984*.

Excellence in Education: A Definition

The children in our schools have diverse abilities and needs. Some may be gifted, others may have average abilities and still others may be "vulnerable" because of factors such as economic deprivation, a handicapping condition, an ethnic or language difference. However, all students are entitled to a quality learning environment on the pre-school, elementary, and secondary school levels. This quality promotes the total development of the child: intellectual, physical, creative, affective, reasoning, social and personal. Further, quality programs within our schools must assist all students to prepare for and assume various life roles, tasks and responsibilities *both* as students and beyond their formal education process.

Excellence exists where: 1) there is a high level of achievement relative to student ability; 2) the potential of each student is realized; 3) the school facilitates the development of an educated, informed, productive, and humane citizenry; and 4) there is a positive school climate/tone. To achieve this, members of the school community (administration, staff, students, parents, outside organizations) work together to identify needs, establish priorities, and solve problems so that a quality school is established which provides effective education.

But what elements are necessary to create a quality learning environment? To determine this, we asked the states involved in this study to evaluate the impact of twenty key human, social and interpersonal factors on the quality of education. The participating states explored two issues regarding this definition. First, is there agreement as to whether these factors contribute to excellence? Second, which of these 20 factors contribute *most* to excellence?

There was overwhelming agreement that these 20 human, social and interpersonal factors are important in contributing to excellence. These 20 factors can be collapsed into four broad clusters (which are not mutually exclusive):

1. *Encouraging and assisting the development of each child's full potential (intellectual, creative, reasoning, physical, affective, social, and personal). Related factors include:*
   - a. Maintaining high expectations for all students.
   - b. Encouraging teachers to involve students in an active learning process, which develops the child's intellectual, reasoning, and creative abilities.
   - c. Helping students to develop an understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of their own and others' values, cultures, and life styles.
   - d. Harnessing student desire to promote excellence, for example through student government and helping peers.

"Efforts at improvement must encompass the school as a system of interacting parts, each affecting the others. Schools will improve slowly, if at all, if reforms are thrust upon them. Rather, the approach having most promise is one that will seek to cultivate the capacity of schools to deal with their own problems, to become self-renewing. Schools will have great difficulty, however, in becoming self-renewing without support from their states, local districts and especially from their surrounding constituencies."

—**John Goodlad**, 1984.

2. *Having an effective school administrator who encourages involvement of all the school's constituents (staff, administration, students, parents, community) to help achieve the school's goals. Related factors include:*
   a. Recognizing that pupil services are essential to the school.
   b. Requiring that all school staff participate in in-service staff development/training, and continuing educational programs.
   c. Nurturing and maintaining constructive relationships between and among staff which includes mutual respect and understanding the particular expertise each can offer.
   d. Establishing adequate ratios between students, teachers and pupil services workers.
   e. Ensuring quality performance of all school staff.
   f. Having a school board which supports policies fostering excellence.
3. *Helping students, families, and community identify and cope with problems which interfere with a child's ability to reach his/her potential. Related factors include:*
   a. Coordinating pupil personnel with community services to help resolve student or school concerns.
   b. Involving parents in their child's education and in the school's overall development.
   c. Schools responding to community factors which may intertere with the education of their students.
   d. Schools establishing and maintaining positive cooperative relationships with their broader outside community (including the business community).
4. *Establishing realistic goals and objectives. Related factors include:*
   a. Defining the particular needs, concerns, problems in a school; determining priorities and selecting a course of action to address these needs.
   b. Seeing the entire school work force and its students as important elements in the operation of the school.

Participating states identified three essential elements of excellence in education:

• A school administrator who involves the total school in achieving goals

• Development of each student's full potential

• Student, family and community cooperation in eliminating problems that interfere with full potential.

.c . Defining how different persons employed by the school can strengthen it by working toward its agreed upon goals; and how they can constructively and creatively address its problems.

What Factors Contribute Most to Excellence?

The 20 factors listed above are the ideal to which we must strive in achieving excellence. However, it is crucial to place the school within its realistic context which recognizes both those supports and constraints which exist within the system. Therefore, the states further explored this definition by arriving at those elements they considered contributed *most* to excellence. Three were identified:

• Having an effective school administrator who encourages involvement of all the school's constituents (staff, administration, students, parents, community) to help achieve the school's goals. Eighty percent of the responding states agreed that this was crucial in fostering excellence.

• Encouraging and assisting the development of each child's full potential (intellectual, creative, reasoning, physical, affective, social and personal). Seventy-five percent of the responding states identified this as extremely important.

• Helping students, families, and community identify and cope with problems which interfere with a child's ability to reach his/her potential. Sixty percent of the states identified this as a priority.

Significantly, these findings relate to research conducted on effective schools. Five key factors identified by leading researchers are:

• Strong administrative leadership

• High expectations for student achievement

• An orderly climate conducive to learning

• An emphasis on the teaching and learning of basic skills

• Ongoing measuring and monitoring of student progress

In the present study, the first two factors seen as contributing most to excellence—having an effective school administrator and facilitating the development of each child's potential—confirm two of the five ingredients listed above.

Effective schools focus on ways to help students achieve at least minimum academic mastery. They can and do make a difference in the lives of children, particularly in the lives of poor children. Once an effective school is in place, we can continue to move along the continuum toward excellence.

Within the effective schools research, intervention strategies reside largely with administrators and teachers. This study confirms that not only can administrators and teachers assume major roles, but also other staff (for example pupil services staff) and resources within the school and its broader community can and should contribute. Other research on effective schools identifies the important role the parent contributes. This study confirms that finding but expands it by acknowledging both the role the parent and the entire school community can play in the pursuit of excellence.

Barriers to Excellence

States were also asked to evaluate 50 barriers to excellence. (See Appendix B). After dividing those 50 barriers into five main categories—family; student/personal; school related; community; and policy, legislative and funding concerns—we compiled the following data on those barriers identified as most significant by the participating states in the study.

Findings on Family Related Barriers

The most significant family barriers to excellence identified by states were:

- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Divorce/Separation
- Parental Apathy
- Family Crisis
- Poverty

Child abuse and neglect were identified as the number one family barrier to excellence, followed by divorce and separation. These in combination with parental apathy and family crisis are examples of internal problems within the family structure. Poverty, an outside force, significantly affects the life of the family and the child's ability to succeed in school.

All of these barriers can and do have significant consequences upon the learning process of the student and in the schools' ability to achieve excellence. All are also interrelated.

Research evidence is mounting to indicate a connection between abuse and neglect and school problems. In a comprehensive study of 378 children removed from their homes in Los Angeles County, California, Kent found in 1976 that these victims of abuse and neglect showed significant academic, behavior and peer-relationship problems in school:[1]

- 53 percent of the abused and 82 percent of the neglected children of school age were rated "Below Average" or "Failing" in academic performance as compared to 28 percent of the control group.
- 67 percent of the abused and 60 percent of the neglected children of school age were rated "Unsatisfactory" with regard to school peer relations as compared to 23 percent of the control group.
- The abused children were rated as more aggressive and disobedient than either the neglected children or the controls.

Kline and Christiansen in a 1975 Utah study of 138 children referred for court action for abuse, neglect and sexual abuse found that these students were placed in special education classes and institutions more frequently than other children, and that their academic achievement was generally below average.[2] The largest number of abused children in special education programs were placed in classes for the emotionally disturbed, and the majority of all the children

"Family problems all affect the child's self-esteem and drain the child of energy that is needed to maximize the child's ability to develop his/her potential."

Midwestern State Report

studied were below grade level in reading, spelling and mathematics.

While further research is needed to determine the exact relationship between abuse and special education, it is clear that child abuse and neglect represents a significant impediment to educational excellence.

Family crises, such as abuse and neglect, divorce, separation, family violence, poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, serious illness and death all can disrupt the life of the child. Research conducted by the National Institute of Education found that students from one-parent homes receive lower grades and teacher ratings of achievement, and also tend to have more absenteeism, truancy, and tardiness than children from two-parent families. Research studies also describe these children as more disruptive, aggressive, immature and less self-controlled. Differences in reaction between younger children and older children have also been demonstrated. Whatever the direct effect of divorce and separation or other crises are on school performance, they undoubtedly cause conflict and distress in varying degrees for the children involved, as demonstrated by the practice experience of participants in this project.

As one participating state from the rural South reported:

> "A family crisis leaves a child preoccupied with feeling overwhelmed. These feelings will interfere with the child's ability to concentrate and to participate freely in the educational process."

Poverty was identified in this study as the fifth major family barrier to excellence. A 1984 analysis by the Congressional Budget Office stated that chidren now have the highest poverty rate of all population groups in the nation. Twenty-two percent of children under eighteen fall below the government poverty line, a total of 13.8 million children. The rate is highest for minority children and in households headed by a woman. For school-aged children the poverty rate was 40 percent for ethnic minorities and 14 percent for non-minorities.

The advantages of early childhood education, especially for poor children, were clearly demonstrated in a recent report on a longitudinal study from the Perry Pre-School project in Ypsilanti, Michigan.[3] Researchers followed a group of 123 children from impoverished backgrounds who had below-average IQ's. They found after 22 years that exposure to Head Start and similar preschool programs resulted in a doubled rate of graduation from high school and lower rates of arrest, detentions, welfare dependency and teenage pregnancies. The study clearly indicates the social benefits and cost effectiveness of early intervention pre-school programs for young children, and has clear implications for the excellence movement.

"In situations of job loss and unemployment, the family's self-image is threatened. The grinding nature of the problem creates a sense of hopelessness which affects not only the clients but also those who would help. Such reactions to those devastating crises are reflected in the children's difficulties in performing well academically."

—A midwestern state report

Compensatory education programs for older children have also proved their long-term value, yet have been seriously curtailed since 1980. A recent Children's Defense Fund survey found that there was a 15 percent decline in the number of children served in the last three years and a dramatic decrease in parental involvement.

While parental apathy was identified as a barrier by 71 percent of the states, several states emphasized that what appeared to be apathy was in effect a response to other factors.

The report from a Southern state included the following:

"Literature and experience shows that parents, regardless of social status, view education as being the most promising means of attaining higher economic status. The dissonance between parents and teachers, therefore, does not lie in the conflicting values attached to education but in the misperceptions they have of one another. Often educators perceive parents' lack of involvement in ritualistic school events, such as parent conferences, as apathy or disinterest. Rarely do educators interpret parents' behavior as the inability to negotiate the bureaucratic maze of the schools or as a possible response to a long history of rejection of the school board. Such disenfranchisement is especially true for black parents."

"Parents may be overwhelmed, defensive, guilt-ridden, angry, fearful, consumed with their own nurturing needs, but they are never apathetic."

Report of an industrialized eastern state.

Findings on Student Personal Barriers

The five most significant student/personal barriers to excellence identified by the states were:

- Low self image
- Problems with parents or other family members
- Truancy—high absenteeism
- Under achievement
- Acting-out behavior

As discussed in the preceding section, family difficulties can interfere with a child's experiences in school. This may be exhibited is such ways as poor academic performance; poor relationships with peers or other adults; reduced concentration level; low self image;

Low self image is a major cause of underachievement, reports a northwestern state: ". . . low self esteem interferes with the child's ability to believe in his/her capabilities. This interferes with how the child approaches schooling, peers, and family, and sets the student up for failure. Failure, of course, reinforces low self esteem and it's a spiraling negative cycle."

irregular attendance which can ultimately result in truancy or dropping out; underachievement; or display of more aggressive or other acting-out behavior. The interplay between family difficulties and student difficulties is summarized appropriately from one midwestern state: "Student attendance and performance difficulties often result when the family system is experiencing divorce, violence, sexual abuse or other forms of dysfunction. When the family system is in a state of disequilibrium, the school-age child's energies are likely to be focused on the intensity of the family problems and he/she is unable to function effectively in school."

Low self image and problems with parents or other family members can be the causes of such behavior as truancy, underachievement, and acting-out behavior. A child who is overly concerned with personal or family problems will not have the energy or the will to work in school.

It appears from the data offered by the participating states that low self esteem is a major deterrent to a child's success in school. A review of related literature in the field supports this conclusion. Testimony presented by the Director of the Center for Early Adolescence at the University of North Carolina to the U.S. Congress in 1983, for example, stated that the issue of self-esteem lay beneath the "disastrous statistics" that show young people taking "terrible risks" with their own lives and the lives of others, including suicide, drug abuse, pregnancy and crime.

A participating state in this study reported:

> Children with low self image or who are underachievers need much encouragement to perform adequately in school. The interest or motivation for learning isn't present in these students, resulting in poor attention to learning tasks. Focusing on problems with peers or parents takes precedence over learning for many students.

Chronic absenteeism and truancy, identified as a problem by 62 percent of the states, was the third major barrier in this category. On any given school day, 8 percent of the nation's school age population is truant from school, and in urban areas this can rise to 30 percent. The New York City Board of Education found recently that more than one-third of its high school students are chronically absent and miss so much class time that it is nearly impossible to teach them. An additional 13 percent are absent often enough to require extraordinary efforts by teachers to keep them up to grade level.

To remedy this problem, the National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended in its 1983 report that "attendance policies with clear incentives and sanctions should be used to reduce time lost through student absenteeism and tardiness."

Students today are under more pressure than existed 20 years ago. Social workers must attend to the needs of the students by assisting the student and helping faculty members to understand these needs. The support of parents and administrators is essential for optimal outcomes.

—A Southern State Report

"Quality education requires the recognition by the School Board, school administrators and teachers of the input parents and pupil personnel providers contribute to a child's learning."

—Report of an industrial state in the eastern U.S.

Indeed, until the recent past, attendance policies in many school districts involved a strong law enforcement orientation based on enforcing compulsory school attendance laws.

But the problem is more complex than enforcement; it involves various contributory factors found in the student, the home, the school and the community. In designing programs to encourage regular attendance, all these factors need to be considered and a variety of school and community resources used. Recognizing early signs of potential problems is important, and pupil services staff can provide useful consultation to teachers and administrators in this regard.

Many of the state reports in this study described school programs which involved parents early in their child's education. Parental involvement appears to be a significant factor in truancy reduction. Collaboration between the juvenile court and the school district in innovative ways is also effective.

Findings on School Related Barriers

The most significant school related barriers to excellence identified by respondents were:

- Lack of positive cooperative relationships between and among students, staff, parents and administration
- Inadequate discipline policies and/or procedures
- Lack of alternative schools to meet needs of special "at risk" groups
- Lack of collaborative teamwork among school professionals

It is striking that 100% of the states identified lack of positive cooperative relationships between and among students, staff, parents and administration as a major barrier. Mutual respect and understanding of the particular expertise different staff can offer are necessary ingredients in facilitating cooperation and teamwork.

All these groups must recognize how each, independently and together, contribute toward a child's success and to the school's movement toward excellence.

A large midwestern agricultural state report summarized the general feedback from many states: "A school cannot be successful unless teachers, parents, staff and students

"School social workers, school psychologists, guidance counselors, school nurses, and attendance officers trained to work with children and their problems are basic to the school discipline issue. Without this professional team working in conjunction with teachers and administrators, we are simply applying a superficial solution to a problem that could disrupt all efforts to achieve educational excellence throughout our system of public education."

—Judith Byrne, *1984*

work toward a common goal . . ."The importance of working toward a common goal is a major ingredient of effective schools. One review of effective schools research states: "Though specific tactics may vary, the general strategy is best characterized as one that promotes collaborative planning, collegial work, and a school atmosphere conducive to experimentation and evaluation."[4]

Inadequate discipline policies and procedures were identified as the second major barrier to excellence in this category. This suggests the need for the development of a responsive, consistent and comprehensive approach to discipline within our schools. Such an approach would eliminate corporal punishment and implement alternative forms of discipline which exclude violence. Research studies on effective schools have found good discipline to be a significant factor in schools which are effective academically. *A Nation at Risk* also recommended that "the burden on teachers for maintaining discipline should be reduced through the development of firm and fair codes of student conduct that are enforced consistently" and by developing alternative programs "to meet the needs of continually disruptive students."[5]

In the NASW Statement on School Discipline presented to the House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education, in 1984, Judith Byrne of the Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia (10th largest school system in the nation) summarized four essential components of its effective discipline system:

1. early prevention of learning and behavior problems
2. timely disciplinary interventions
3. fair and consistent discipline policies
4. adequate student support services within the school system.

All these features involve teamwork and collaboration between educators and support staff.

Teams regularly meet to consider early indications that students are having academic or behavioral problems and intervene in the classroom or in the child's life outside of school. Discipline policies are formulated with student participation, and a booklet on Student Responsibilities and Rights is distributed to all students and their parents. This handbook addresses the procedures to be followed when students violate the discipline code. These procedures involve counseling, time-out centers, conferences with parents and administrators, referral to the school social worker, or finally, a hearing

with the area superintendent at which appropriate services from within the school and in the community are explored and utilized. Very low rates of truancy and dropping-out in Fairfax speak to the effectiveness of this comprehensive approach to school discipline.

Innovations are particularly needed in meeting the special needs of "at risk" groups, such as: the racially isolated student; the "socially maladjusted" student; the potential drop-out; the pregnant adolescent or teenage parent; the student with a history of academic failure; or the student who has been repeatedly held back. The lack of alternative schools for students "at risk" was identified as a major barrier to excellence in this study.

First and foremost, early intervention and prevention programs must be provided to reduce the incidence of these problems. Many of the participating states in this study described current school and community efforts to conduct such programs. These approaches include: training of staff to recognize early signs of problem behavior; health curriculum innovations which address parenting and health care; conducting groups to provide direct support to these youth; and offering support services to the families.

Alternative schools provide another approach, particularly when the problem behavior has reached more serious proportions. These schools can provide opportunities for students to attend a school with significantly fewer students and with opportunities to relate to a reduced number of school personnel. Student anonymity can be reduced and connections between the student and the school can be strengthened. Youth in alternative schools should have opportunities for vocational education and working in their community in order to promote the linkages between school and work.

A major task before the school is how it and the community can build and strengthen their cooperation and team to facilitate success for all its students. Disadvantaged youth must continue to receive our commitment and resources. As a 1984 report from the Massachusetts Advocacy Center states:

> "The committment to the education of disadvantaged students must be reaffirmed and expanded; access gains of the past 20 years must be maintained. Programs which have been designed to meet the needs of disadvantaged, special education and bilingual students should be used as models of improving the quality of education for all."[6]

Findings on Community Barriers

Only one of the four community barriers listed in the survey was selected by over 50 percent of the states. Sixty-seven percent of the states identified lack of support services within the community as a major barrier. We

"Excellence cannot be achieved by the school alone—we need a coalition of school, community, home and students . . . If we valued education more, it would be easier for this coalition to move forward. A cooperative partnership effort needs to develop between the school and community. The school needs to make the community aware of its problems and needs. The community needs to communicate ways in which it is and can become more responsive."

—Report from a midwestern state

have already documented the number and range of problems students and schools may have which will interfere with excellence. It is clear that it is not the responsibility of the school alone to address all the human and social needs. One midwestern industrial state report addresses this concern.

> "We are beginnning to see students with multiple problems that influence educational achievement. They require services at several community resources . . .. Many of our school districts do not have the services of professionals to provide support services except on a minimal level. Cooperative relationships are most likely to be established when there is specialized personnel to address student needs both within the school and community."

Therefore the linkages between the school and its broader outside community need to be strengthened. A western state reported:

> "A lack of preventative mental health programs, such as those which address drug, alcohol problems, family counseling, etc. leaves the school with additional responsibilities in these areas. An additional concern is the growing indifference toward education and the negative image of educators. This barrier seems to prevent some educators and school personnel from doing the extra tasks it takes to be 'excellent' because of the lack of recognition and appreciation for doing them."

Findings on Policy: Legislative/Funding Barriers

The two most significant Policy/Legislative/Funding barriers to excellence were:

- Limits in funding
- Differential cutbacks in staffing with particular reductions in pupil service staff.

In the previous sections, the human and social needs facing our schools were documented. In order to address these concerns, resources are needed. Two critical resources are funding and staffing. This study confirmed that reductions and cutbacks in these two areas are major barriers to excellence. The cutbacks in funding have detrimental effects on both the school and community services. One southern report summarized the feedback from many states:

> "Everyone is feeling the results of a tightening economy and reduced federal dollars. State and community funds are not available to fill the gaps.

and as a result, levels of service to children are decreasing. Overall authorized services are not being cut, but it appears that the number of staff available to provide the services is being reduced."

A dramatic example of the effects of these cutbacks on one midwestern family appears in one state report:

"Cutbacks in authorized human services (such as homemaker supportive services) had detrimental effects on a family in which the single parent did not speak English, received AFDC and had a teenage daughter. The failure to provide parenting support, family and budget management, tutoring, English as a second language, etc., resulted in the child's irregular school attendance, poor school performance, and subsequent delinquent behavior, and commitment to an expensive, tax-supported institution. Community based family support services are less costly in a number of ways than residential or institutional care. The human cost in further family breakdown and disruption may be much greater than even the dollars and cents cost of institutionalization."

This reality will deter the efforts of the school and community to achieve excellence. Adequate funding is needed within the school and community to serve those youth already at risk as well as for prevention and early intervention programs. As cited in the above example, the long term human and financial costs of inadequate funding and lack of programs can ultimately result in even larger expenditures.

The goal of achieving excellence requires the involvement of quality staff as well as the maintenance, expansion and creation of new services or programs. One western state report underscores the negative effects funding reductions have on maintaining quality staff:

"Limits in funding result in less staff to address the barriers prevalent in every school. Low salary scales for educators lead to a less professional view of education and cause a loss of highly qualified people from the profession."

This theme is reinforced in another state report: "Funding cutbacks on the federal and state level have caused reductions in existing support services and curtailed planned growth."

If we are to achieve excellence, we must harness the potential of all persons within the school to work toward this goal. Attention must be given to the best types of learning environments which will facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, mastery of basic skills, development of abstract thinking, reasoning and problem-solving skills. But equal attention must be given to the host of human and

"Until children can come to school supported by parents and community in the knowledge that: they are worthwhile as individuals; professional help is available to them when needed; programs are available of a nature suitable to their ability level—there will continue to be barriers to achieving excellence in education and the nation's children will continue to be 'at risk'"

—midwestern U.S. industrial state report

social factors which can interfere with the attainment of excellence. This suggests clear and important roles for pupil personnel service staff (school social workers, guidance counselors, psychologists and nurses) in developing programs and services within the school as well as needed partnerships between the school and its broader outside community.

Those significant barriers identified in this study have been presented. However, it is important to stress that not only these but all human and social factors need to be considered within each particular school, district and community. Depending upon the demography, resources and constraints available, the critical human and social factors may differ. Most important is to become more aware of those human and social factors which can interfere with excellence.

Recommendations

The recommendations which follow are divided into two parts. Part I deals with strategies for promoting excellence as articulated in our definition of excellence. Part II of the recommendations are specific strategies for overcoming those student, family, school, community and policy/legislative barriers identified in the study. The recommendations are a composite of suggestions offered by the states. They are based on programs which are achieving goals of excellence as well as strategies that need to be expanded. The recommendations are not mutually exclusive, but rather are interdependent. Therefore, many of these and the action strategies may overlap with one another.

Part I:

Recommendation:

Strengthen Collaboration between the School and Community

Schools and communities need to establish partnerships with each other. The schools need to articulate regularly to their community the particular needs, concerns and problems affecting them. The community then needs to communicate those services and programs available that could possibly respond to these needs. The bridging of these services will require a liaison between the schools and community to facilitate this communication.

Because of their links outwards into the community, school social workers and other pupil service workers can make an important contribution to this effort. They can collect information about various community services and serve as a clearinghouse to school staff, parents and students regarding services available in the community. Through this collaboration, model programs can develop.

Recommendation:

Strengthen Pupil Services

Teachers need to be able to teach. Therefore, schools must enrich pupil services to serve those children whose problems impede their learning and frustrate the teacher's efforts. School social work and school psychological services in particular, should be available to the entire school population and not confined to handicapped students as is now the case in many states. Many of the national reports on educational reform have emphasized the need for more instructional time and the need to keep interruptions and distractions to a minimum. This report has documented the incidence of problems students bring with them to school. To impose ever increasing burdens on teachers to handle problems such as child abuse and neglect is not the answer.

Schools should strengthen their pupil services component by giving school social workers, psychologists, guidance counselors and nurses increased responsibility and par-

ticipation. This is not a luxury; it is a necessary investment in excellence.

Pupil Services Bureaus should be established in all State Education Agencies and should contain consultants for each discipline within the pupil services team. An office of pupil services should also be established within the Department of Education.

Recommendation:

Increase Parent Involvement

Because parents are the child's first teachers, schools need to reach out actively to parents and involve them in meaningful ways, such as: using them as teacher aides and volunteers, recruiting them for fund raising, monitoring their child's attendance, supervising or assisting with teachers' homework assignments. All of these efforts help to reinforce classroom instruction.

To meet the particular needs of single or working parents, schools need to show flexibility in the scheduling of parent teacher conferences and of other parent meetings. At the same time, employers need to provide this flexibility for parents in the work force in order that they will be able to attend an important school meeting, parent-teacher conference, or other event. In the case of divorce, and particularly where joint custody occurs, schools must make a greater effort to involve both parents.

Recommendation:

Emphasize Early Intervention and Prevention

Schools need to develop programs of early screening of handicapping conditions (such as social, emotional, and learning difficulties) experienced by school children. In addition, school programs must identify gifted children early. Pupil service workers and teachers are in a unique position to provide early identification. Once a child has been identified as having a special need, services must be provided as early as possible. In order for prevention to be effective, in-service training is needed to sensitize all staff to these early signs and to develop appropriate interventions. School social workers and other pupil service professionals should be utilized as trainers and as coordinators of staff development programs.

Recommendation:

Expand the Use of the School Building

School usage should be extended beyond the regular school day. As there are growing numbers of children without adult supervision from the end of the school day until their parent(s) return from work, youth need to have places for structured and secure activities. Use of the school building is a valuable, yet under-utilized resource. The school and community agencies need to provide a wide range of recreational, social, and educational programs not only for the school aged youth, but for persons of all ages. This will also strengthen the relationship between the school and community.

Part II:

Recommendation:

Develop and Implement Strategies for Overcoming Family Barriers to Excellence

Education about family life and problems—targeted at students, staff and parents—is a key strategy for overcoming family barriers to excellence. If necessary, this can be provided outside of school hours. Following are several specific steps for schools and communities to take to address family barriers.

Action Strategies

1. Develop school curricula from pre-kindergarten through high school on sexual abuse, child abuse and neglect and family violence that emphasize the tools students need to deal with these problems. Some innovative programs identified in this study are using multi-media approaches in the development of such curricula.

2. Develop clear policies and procedures for the immediate reporting of all suspected abuse and neglect. School social workers should be included in the reporting process.

   To get staff support and involvement, in-service training should be provided for all staff. This training could include: information on detecting signs of abuse and neglect; responsibility of staff in the reporting of these suspected cases; and information on existing legislation.

3. Establish ongoing collaboration and coordination between the school and community agencies such as protective services, mental health agencies, day care, and others. The school social worker is in a unique position to serve as the liaison between the school and staff of social service agencies and to serve as case manager when a number of agencies are serving a student.

   Families in crises often need additional support services. Frequently, however, they may be unaware of available community assistance. School social workers and other pupil service workers could provide information and referral in this area.

4. Develop parenting education in such areas as maintaining realistic expectations for children; basic information on child development; effective ways of dealing with children's behavior; effective communication skills; and how to cope as a single parent or with other family stresses. These programs could be organized and conducted by pupil service workers in the schools or by a staff of community agencies in the school or community.

5. Reach out to parents appearing uninvolved or detached from the school, but who may in reality feel overwhelmed by school bureaucracy or burdened with excessive responsibilities. The pupil service support team and school administrators should fulfill this function so that teachers can focus on instruction.

6. Continue and expand school nutrition programs to provide students with the diet necessary for optimal learning.

7. Continue and expand federal Headstart and Chapter I programs for disadvantaged students. The U.S. Congress should intensify its oversight of Chapter I and increase its funding for this and other compensatory education programs.

Recommendation:

Develop and Implement Strategies for Overcoming Student Barriers to Excellence

Low self image is a major obstacle to school success and often a precursor to other school difficulties, such as truancy, underachievement and acting-out behavior. There is frequently a relationship between the child's low self image and the way he/she is perceived in the home, school and community. Frequently, these systems have low expectations which will result in the development

of a poor self image. Therefore, it becomes incumbent upon the home, school and community to maintain high and realistic expectations for all students. The key to improving self esteem is the provision of student opportunities for success whether in academics, vocational education, athletics or other extra-curricular activities. Following are several specific steps schools and communities can take to overcome student barriers to excellence.

Action Strategies

1. Provide opportunities for meaningful roles where youth can be helping others so that students can learn to make the connections between the school and the rest of their lives. Curriculum should be expanded which allows students to earn credit by providing community service during or after the school day. This would parallel innovative programs where students enrich their language, science or business curricula by exposure to corporations or other enterprises in the community. Strong and innovative vocational education programs should also be maintained.

2. Develop specific methods to promote the positive self image of all students through positive reinforcement and successful achievement of goals. These could include: modified and individualized curriculum to meet special learning needs; opportunities where students can work with younger children (either in school or day care centers, etc.) or older persons; meaningful opportunities for students to excel in an area of interest (e.g. hobbies, sports, the arts, etc.); programs to develop problem solving, coping, communication skills, etc.

3. Provide opportunities for students experiencing personal or family difficulties or exhibiting poor school performance or behavior, to discuss these difficulties with school staff. Mechanisms need to be developed where school staff, primarily pupil services, can organize and conduct special group programs to work with these students experiencing common needs such as groups for children of divorce. At the same time, the school can encourage the community to supplement these programs which can be held at the school or in a community setting.

4. Encourage the utilization of volunteers such as parents, retired persons or college students within the schools.

5. Establish connections with local colleges and universities. College students could work with younger students, either individually or in groups, in areas such as: tutoring, big brother/big sister programs, assistance in developing a student's interest or hobby, or the promotion of socialization skills.

6. Develop orientation programs to facilitate student "transitions" (for example, elementary to junior high; junior high to high school; high school and beyond; moving into a new community) for those youth having potential difficulties in these adjustments. Older students, for example, could be big brothers or sisters to younger incoming students.

Recommendation:

Develop and Implement Strategies for Overcoming School Barriers to Success

School systems need to broaden their concept of who constitutes the school. The focus

should be on people as well as academics. Schools should clarify for themselves the particular functions and roles of each component group, and then educate each group about the others. In this way mutual respect, trust and teamwork would be facilitated. This would contribute towards a more harmonious school climate in which excellence can flourish. Following are several specific steps schools and communities can take to overcome school barriers to success.

"The use of physical violence against persons, particularly dependent children, is antithetical to the best values of a democratic society and of the social work profession. Thus, NASW opposes the use of corporal punishment in schools and all other institutions, both public and private, in which children are cared for and educated."

—NASW Delegate Assembly Policy Statement, 1984

Action Strategies

1. Develop alternative discipline policies and procedures for dealing with non-violent, non-assaultive behaviors and eliminate corporal punishment. Emphasis should be given to developing in-school suspension programs which are carefully supervised. These programs could be conducted by school social workers and other pupil service staff.
2. Develop a code of conduct in every school that clearly articulates student rights and responsibilities, and which is understood by all. In developing these policies, administrators should involve teachers, pupil service staff, and other school staff, students and parents.
3. Review annually those human and social needs which are most pressing (just as schools conduct ongoing assessments of student academic performance) and implement actions to address these needs.
4. Involve all staff in an ongoing process of assessing needs, determining priorities, setting goals and developing actions to work toward those common goals.
5. Create mechanisms to strengthen and improve the relationships between school personnel and parents. Mediation services and model programs providing training in effective communication need to be identified and replicated. Trainers for these programs could be school social workers or other pupil services staff.
6. Develop special programs (both in-school and alternative programming) to meet the needs of special "at risk" groups. These could include: suicide prevention programs, drug prevention and education programs, desegregation programs, drop-out prevention, and programs for pregnant students and adolescent parents. We must identify and replicate those model programs which are successfully reaching out to "at risk" youth and helping them to continue their education and feel more hopeful about their lives. In the case of the racially isolated student, desegregation programs which actively involve the school and its community must be promoted. Regarding programs on pregnancy and teenage parents, schools and communities need to provide parenting education programs as well as provide adequate day care facilities.
7. Conduct in-service workshops clarify-

ing the roles and functions of school staff in order to facilitate cooperation and understanding among school personnel.

8. Develop aggressive methods of reaching out to the media to demonstrate how the school and community are working together to support and promote excellence in education. Specifically, public service announcements for television, radio, business newsletters, newspapers, etc. could be developed jointly with business professionals to educate the public about the importance of excellence in education—stressing how the community can support, promote, and become involved in the educational process.
9. Develop college level curricula for students of education stressing training on the effect of human and social needs on the child's ability to learn and succeed in school.
10. Develop university level interdisciplinary training programs for regular and special education teachers and pupil services personnel.

Recommendation:

Develop and Implement Strategies to Overcome Community, Policy, Legislative and Funding Barriers to Excellence

The community needs to be aware of the particular problems and concerns of its schools. Through this process, the community may be able to develop and provide services responding to these needs.

Action Strategies

1. Encourage and expand innovative and exciting cooperative approaches between the business community and schools. Examples of successful operating programs identified in this study include: the linking of school social work services with employee assistance programs to aid parents of handicapped children, and a business "adopting a school" for purposes of increasing educational opportunities for students.
2. Develop equitable funding of public schools from tax levied, state and federal sources throughout the country. Strengthen federal support for education.
3. Provide a combination of special education and general education funding for pupil service positions.

   Many successful innovative programs were identified by states. These included: school improvement projects, new curricula on sexual abuse; groups to improve students' self image and self esteem; programs to increase parent involvement; linkages with business; and innovations in discipline procedures. Methods to disseminate information about successful operating programs need to be developed. In this way, these successful programs can be replicated.

Conclusion

Learning within our schools must facilitate the development of students over a broad spectrum to include intellectual and cognitive abilities; the mastery of basic skills; analytical, reasoning and thinking abilities; social, interpersonal and creative potential and fostering an understanding and acceptance of self and others.

The pursuit of excellence for all cannot be achieved by one prescribed course. Rather, there are many different paths which will ultimately lead to the desired destination. As social workers, we are concerned about what is happening to the youth within our schools. As members of interdisciplinary teams within the school, we must look to ways of strengthening those links between schools and communities. We must tap resources within the school and community. Educators must educate; teachers must teach; pupil services staff must respond to the human, social and interpersonal factors that interfere with a child's ability for school success; and the broader outside community must also respond and serve its constituents.

The path toward excellence is a long one. But together, through efforts of the entire school, the home and community this common goal and dream can be achieved.

Appendix A

Methodology of the Study

A leadership role was assumed by NASW in requesting school social workers on a statewide basis to organize this exploratory study. Thirty states agreed to participate, reflecting the geographical diversity of the country: the West, Midwest, South, North and Northeast. States were asked to consider the following key issues:

- What is excellence in education?
- What human and social factors interfere most with excellence?
- What effective programs currently exist which support and promote excellence?
- What recommendations can be offered as to how excellence can be promoted and how barriers can be overcome?

To obtain information on these questions, NASW prepared a survey instrument in consultation with leading professionals in the field of school social work. The major items examined in this survey were: The rating of human, social and interpersonal factors that contribute to excellence; the identification of those human and social barriers which interfere most with excellence within the respondent's own school districts; the description of successful operating programs promoting excellence; and recommendations for action that schools and communities can take to overcome barriers and promote excellence.

NASW staff identified at least one key school social worker from each participating State to serve as its Coordinator. It was the responsibility of the Coordinator(s) to organize their state action plan for this project. Over 90 percent of the participating states obtained their information by the survey method.

This report reflects the collective input of over 500 individuals from 22 of the 30 participating states. Seventy-nine percent of these individuals were school social workers; 21 percent included social workers from other organizations, public officials, teachers, university staff, superintendents, principals, staff of other public agencies, school boards, parents, other pupil personnel workers and other school supervisory staff. Given the diversity of the participants in this study, there was a significant amount of consensus on major issues and directions.

The participating states and state coordinators were:

California
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Karen Cancino
Frances Matthies

Colorado
Linda Zeisloft

Connecticut
Jeffrey Forman

Florida
Wilma Austin
Mary Alice Valentine

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Randy Fisher
Eleida Gomez
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Shirley McDonald
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Elizabeth Miller

Washington
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Washington, D.C.
Zillah Wesley

Wisconsin
Lorraine Davis
Janet Engelke

Wyoming
Linda Dugan

Appendix B:

Barriers to Excellence

The barriers included in the study were developed in the following way: Through a review of recent literature and research, NASW listed some key barriers to excellence. These barriers were reviewed by leading experts in the field of school social work. Based on their feedback, 50 barriers were identified. These were divided into the 5 categories listed below. These barriers are not mutually exclusive, but rather are interdependent.

Family Barriers

1. Divorce/separation of parents
2. Single parent families
3. Physical illness of a family member
4. Mental illness of a family member
5. Child abuse/neglect
6. Sexual abuse
7. Loss of a job of a family member (recent crisis)
8. Alcohol or drug abuse/addiction
9. Unemployment (chronic)
10. Poverty
11. Teenage pregnancy of a sibling
12. Death of a family member or other significant person
13. Recent immigration
14. Family crisis
15. Parental apathy

Student/Personal Barriers

1. Difficulty in adjusting to a new school, community (e.g. recent immigration or move, transitions from elementary to junior high to high school)
2. Underachievement
3. Teenage sexuality (pregnancy, sexually active, gay and lesbian, abortion, etc.)
4. Truancy/high absenteeism
5. Acting-out behavior
6. Depression
7. Use/abuse of drugs or alcohol
8. Incidence of suicidal behavior
9. Low self-image
10. Problems in peer relationships
11. Problems with parents or other family members
12. Excessive home responsibilities
13. Learning disability/other handicapping condition
14. Feelings of isolation related to differences (e.g. cultural, ethnic, etc.)
15. Problems with teachers & other school staff

School Related Barriers

1. Inadequate attendance policies (re: absenteeism or truancy)
2. Inadequate discipline policies and /or procedures (re: acting-out, suspension, expulsion
3. Use of corporal punishment.
4. Lack of positive cooperative relationships between the school and its outside community
5. Lack of positive cooperative relationships between and among students, staff, parents, administration
6. Lack of policies/procedures to address drop-out prevention.
7. Lack of alternative schools to meet the needs of special "at risk" groups
8. Lack of services or programs for the gifted or talented child
9. Lack of bilingual programs
10. Lack of services to help recent immigrant students adjust to their new school
11. Lack of collaborative teamwork among school professionals
12. Inadequate staff/student ratio

Community Barriers

1. Places low value on education
2. Indifference toward the school
3. Lack of support services within the community (e.g. after school, recreation, adult education, day care programs, etc.)
4. Deteriorated neighborhood (e.g. poor housing, crime, drug traffic, etc.)

Policy/Legislative and Funding Barriers

1. Limits in funding
2. Differential cutbacks in staffing, with particular reductions in pupil services staff
3. Cutbacks in authorized services

A copy of the survey instrument is available from the NASW National Office.

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